

Air Force fighter retires, but refuses to give up

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New Delhi: Squadron leader (Retd) Prem Khullar is working on a war footing providing medical cover and aid to widows in Behrola village, Palwal district in Haryana state bordering Delhi.

Sixty-five kilometers away from the city on the Delhi-Mathura Road, Khullar opened a charitable hospital ABLE (Association for Blindness and Leprosy Eradication) in 1998 to ensure that medical facilities reached the destitute.

Having retired from the Air Force in 1982, the soldier in him refused to give up on serving his country folk. He often heard stories of how the poor villagers despite scarce resources traveled to the city hospitals only to be fleeced by the doctors and the nursing staff.

"Several times lives were lost for lack of timely medical attention," Khullar said.

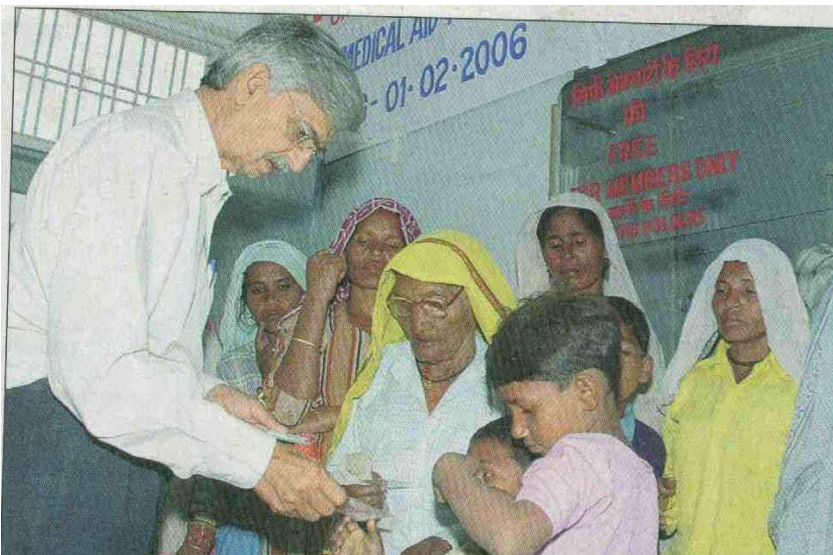
In 1993, he set up a one-room unit in Mitrol providing medical care to the villagers by appointing a dedicated medical staff.

"I started with the intention of working in the rural areas where although some rudimentary facilities were created by the government, they were not implemented properly," said Khullar.

He soon won the confidence of the village elders, who donated 34,000 square yards of land in Behrola village to set up a large hospital that could help other villages in the vicinity.

ABLE Hospital treats 2,500 patients each month and performs more than 500 operations annually.

The fully functional medical departments include cardiology, gynecology, pediatric, radiology, dermatology, dentistry, ENT, physiotherapy, orthopedics and surgical units.



Khullar has recently launched a medical cover for the widows at the hospital.

"My basic aim is to save the widows from preventable death and stop the creation of orphans. Ninety per cent of these women are below 40 years of age having no steady income. It results in malnutrition and slow death," he said.

ABLE has provided medical cover of up to Rs25,000 a year and enrolled 800 widows since January this year. Its target is to enroll at least 2,000 women in 99 villages within the next few months.

Khullar said: "The widows have to pay a membership fee of Rs180 annually that is 50 paise per day and get covered under medical facilities available in the hospital. Since these women are uneducated and unable to sustain a family of 2-3 children, it will benefit them in times of medical need and save the children from becoming orphans."

The retired armed forces officer is very positive that his schemes to help the impoverished will set an example for others to take up similar measures and serve the country.

He said: "If we get considerable financial help, we shall increase the amount to also include children of widows."

Individuals interested in helping can write to ableindia@yahoo.com